



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 2:00pm on
Wednesday 14 January 2026

Present:

Cllr Chika Akinwale (left at 4:15 pm)
Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith
Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Lavinia Edwards
Cllr Mark Goldsack (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Martin Goodearl
Cllr Bill Hunt (Chair)
Cllr James Lay
Cllr Alan Sharp
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Ross Trent
Cllr Mary Wade (substitute)

Officers:

Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Philip Baum – Planning Officer
Kevin Breslin – Locum Planning Lawyer
Sophie Brown – Planning Team Leader
Rachael Forbes – Senior Planning Officer
Yole Medieros – Major Projects Officer
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager
Christopher Partrick – Conservation Officer

In attendance:

ECDC Comms
Members of the public

39. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christine Whelan. Cllr Mary Wade substituted for Cllr Christine Whelan.

40. Declarations of interest

Cllr Bill Hunt declared an interest in agenda item 7, Main Street, Little Thetford, as he knew the applicant. He left the Chamber whilst this item was discussed. He did not participate in the debate and did not vote.

Cllr Christine Colbert declared an interest in agenda item 6, Little Lane, Ely, as the applicant. She left the meeting whilst this item was discussed. She did not participate in the debate and did not vote. Cllr Colbert also declared an interest in agenda item 5, land off Water Lane, Kirtling, as she had been present at the Committee that had discussed this item in July. She declared that she was coming to the meeting afresh and with an open mind.

Cllr Alan Sharp declared an interest in agenda item 5, land off Water Lane, Kirtling. He had called this decision in as the local member and had been present at the Committee that had discussed this matter in July. He declared that he was coming to the meeting with an open mind.

41. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

42. Chair's announcements

The Chair reported that agenda item 10 would be discussed after agenda item 5, due to the amount of public interest in this item.

43. 25/00371/FUL – Land Off Water Lane, Kirtling

Rachael Forbes, Senior Planning Officer, presented a report (AA114, previously circulated) recommending refusal for the building of a purpose built Wildlife Veterinary Hospital including residential facilities on land off Water Lane in Kirtling. She stated that Planning Committee on 2 July 2025 had voted to defer this application. However, despite amendments to the application the officer's recommendation was to refuse on the grounds of conflicts with policies GROWTH 2, ENV1 and ENV2.

The Committee received the following statement from objector Simon Gooderham:

"Good afternoon, my name is Simon Gooderham, I am a resident of Kirtling and speaking as an objector to this application. I am also speaking on behalf of a number of other local residents, some of whom are here today, who are strong objectors to this application.

"This objection is not about being against the support and care of wildlife, it is about upholding the policies of East Cambs District Council and protecting the countryside. The application is for a 24/7 commercial scale wildlife hospital situated in open countryside, which would cause irreversible damage to the

landscape and tranquillity of the area and will have a detrimental effect on the residential amenity of neighbouring dwellings because of noise and light pollution. The proposed development is totally inappropriate for this location, and wildlife care can be provided on a more suitable and sustainably located site.

“Whilst the revised application includes additional design and supporting information, no amount of design or mitigation can overcome the fact that development in this location is fundamentally contrary to a number of the East Cambs District Council Local Plan policies, and the proposal is not supported by any overriding National Planning policies.

“The application site is outside of the Kirtling village development envelope and is contrary to East Cambs Policy EMP 3 which states that rural employment sites should be “closely related to the built framework of the village”. The location of the proposed development is contrary to this Policy.

“East Cambs Policy GROWTH 6 has been adopted to prevent sprawl into the open countryside and therefore the application is contrary to the strategic objectives of the Local Plan. The proposed residential accommodation on site is unjustified and is contrary to East Cambs Policy HOU 5 (Dwellings for Rural Workers) which permits such housing only where there is a proven and essential functional need. The proposed shift pattern of workers at the site means that there is no requirement for permanent living accommodation and the need for such a facility is neither proven nor essential.

“The assessment of alternative sites is inaccurate and misleading, and there have been a number of suitable alternative sites available to purchase in the past 12-18 months in the locality which would have much less harm and impact on the rural landscape. The development will result in the loss of high-quality Grade 2 agricultural land and this type of facility should be situated on a previously developed site or on lower quality Grade 3 or 4 land or in close proximity to an established veterinary facility.

“In addition to being contrary to the above major policies, the proposal will require significant highway improvements which will impact on a Protected Road Verge, and the proposed development is located immediately adjacent to an active badger sett and will have a direct impact on this protected species.

“There are significant material planning considerations why this application should be refused, and no justification to deviate from the adopted policies in the East Cambs Local Plan, the very purpose of which are in place to prevent inappropriate development in this type of location. We strongly urge the Committee to uphold the recommendations of the planning officer and to refuse this application for all the grounds stated in the officer’s report and this statement.”

Councillors were invited to ask questions to Simon Gooderham.

Following questioning from Cllr Christine Colbert, Simon Gooderham explained that there had been a number of alternative sites for the development that had become available in the parish and across the district. Many of these sites were on the outskirts of villages, were screened by hedgerows and in his view would have been affordable.

The Committee received the following statement from the applicant's agent Angie Curtis:

"I am here to support the Long Acre Wildlife Hospital application: a purpose-built veterinary wildlife hospital, with modest on-site accommodation.

"This is not a speculative scheme. It is a practical response to a real and worsening crisis. Local wildlife is under increasing pressure, while rescue capacity across the region is shrinking rapidly.

"In the last two years alone, more than nine wildlife rescue centres have closed in the region. When centres close, the need does not disappear—it is displaced. It falls onto those remaining and, ultimately, onto individuals like Sue.

"Sue treats more than 1,000 animals every year: not just hedgehogs, but deer, foxes, badgers, bats, birds, hares and leverets, rabbits, stoats and weasels. Her operation has outgrown what can be delivered within a domestic home. Every room is now used for treatment, recovery, quarantine or storage.

"This is not sustainable for animal welfare, biosecurity, or for Sue herself. Without a purpose-built facility, there is a very real risk that this established, trusted service will be forced to close. It also supports ten smaller rescue centres, each taking between 50 and 150 hedgehogs a year. Losing Sue's facility would mean losing that entire network, that supports another 900 hedgehogs annually.

"This proposal keeps the service alive with a proper clinical base. A concern has been raised that the on-site accommodation is a "ruse" for a house in the countryside. It is not.

"Sue is the founder, the key worker, and the person providing 24/7 care. Wildlife admissions are unpredictable. Juvenile and critically injured animals require frequent feeding, medication and monitoring – day and night. Emergencies can arrive at any time. The accommodation proposed is modest and functionally inseparable from the hospital.

"If Members wish to secure this further, they can with conditions: standard safeguards that allow the hospital to function whilst protecting countryside policy.

"This application relates to a defined 1.18-acre red line boundary, within the 27-acre field, which will be managed as a wildlife meadow, with native planting, habitat creation and ecological restoration of the land.

“The hospital is a contained, purpose-built facility within a much larger conservation-led landscape. It is not an urbanising intrusion; it creates a nett gain for biodiversity. Sue is keen to engage with the Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy team with woodland and tree planting that aligns the site with county-wide nature recovery objectives.

“Sue has spent over six years searching for a suitable site. Many sites were unavailable or unsuitable. Long Acre meets the important requirements of wildlife rehabilitation:

- no overhead power lines
- separation from dense housing
- minimal light pollution
- and, critically, low noise.

“Noise is not theoretical. A stressed leveret can fail to thrive—or even die—due to disturbance. This hospital is designed to be tranquil by necessity. That same tranquillity protects neighbours: this is not a public attraction, but a quiet, well-managed facility with controlled drop-offs and low traffic.

“The site lies just outside the village envelope; it is not a typical residential or commercial development, but a specialist wildlife hospital that must, by its nature, be in a rural setting. To assess it, as if it were another housing proposal misses its essential purpose and public benefit.

“Most technical concerns have been answered. Highways and parking are no longer reasons for refusal. Visual amenity objections have been substantially conceded. Environmental Health has not objected, and any residual noise concerns can be addressed by condition rather than refusal. Ecological matters can be resolved through engagement with the appointed ecologists and the LNRS process.”

Members were invited to ask questions to Angie Curtis and Sue Stubley.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, Sue Stubley stated that she had spent the last six to seven years looking for alternative sites. She had been out bid on one site and the owner had decided not to sell a second site. All other sites had not been unsuitable due to their proximity to roads or power lines. She owned the site of the application and the surrounding land, which animals such as hares and leverets could be released onto. She added that wild animals could often die through stress when transported but animals could be released onto the land surrounding the site of the proposed development, where hares and leverets were already living.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale and Cllr Christine Colbert, Sue Stubley stated she planned to live on the site of the hospital, as the animals required constant care and it was difficult to secure volunteers to work throughout the night.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Angie Curtis explained that the project had a fund raising campaign in place, waiting for planning permission to be granted, but it would be fraudulent to raise money without planning permission. The project

had 10,000 named supporters and a plan was in place to fund the ongoing costs over the longer term. She added that the containers on site would be moved as part of the building plan.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, Angie Curtis confirmed that the £1.5 million required related to building costs. Sue Stubley explained that it was not possible to expand the existing hospital, and a larger premises was required. The plans for the new hospital included an operating theatre and an X-ray facility.

The Senior Planning Officer reported that the Highways Authority had estimated the cost of their works on site as £35,000 to £85,000. In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, Angie Curtis accepted that the cost of the roadworks could be more than the amount estimated by the Highways Authority.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Sue Stubley explained that the proposed hospital would be able to offer work experience for veterinary nurses as part of their training.

Councillors were asked if they had any questions for the officers.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, the Senior Planning Officer explained that the report to the Planning Committee in July had listed five reasons for refusal. Two of these issues, ecological and highways, had been addressed and so the report to the Committee recommended refusal for three reasons. The site was outside the development envelope in contravention of policy GROWTH 2 of the Local Plan. The development would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and the resulting noise and disturbance would have a detrimental effect on the nearby occupiers in contravention of policies ENV1 and ENV2 of the Local Plan.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, the Senior Planning Officer confirmed that a condition could be added as part of the Section 106 Agreement to ensure that the building was restricted for use as an animal hospital.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Senior Planning Officer explained that the work of caring for animals could be covered by shift workers and so there was no need for someone to stay there all night.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr James Lay stated that whilst there would be local support for a wildlife hospital in the district, there was opposition for any development outside the village envelope. He supported the officer's recommendation to refuse the application. Cllr Christine Colbert disagreed, and stated that by its very nature, a wildlife hospital had to be located in a remote area, away from existing development.

Cllr Alan Sharp expressed his sympathy for the application but stated that it was in the wrong location. He could not support the building of a facility that was outside the village envelope, on agricultural land, which would create noise

disturbance and a detrimental visual impact on the area. Cllr John Trapp agreed, stating that it was large, intrusive building in the wrong location. Cllr Bill Hunt recognised the emotive support for a wildlife hospital, but he could not support an application contrary to the Council's policies for a building outside the village envelope. Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith agreed. Cllr Mark Goldsack expressed his sympathy for the applicant who needed to find a remote location where development was permitted. He had concerns about the cost of the building and associated works. He queried whether the development could be completed within the three-year timeframe.

Cllr John Trapp proposed and Cllr Bill Hunt seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 9 votes in favour, 3 votes against and no abstentions.

It was resolved:

to refuse planning application 25/00371/FUL, for the reasons laid out in the report.

44. 25/01170/FUL – Little Lane, Ely

Cllr Christine Colbert left the Chamber whilst this item was discussed.

Philip Baum, Planning Officer, presented this report (AA115, previously circulated), which recommended that the Committee approve the application for a garage conversion, removal of garage door and infill with window and addition of porch to rear.

Councillors were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Planning Officer confirmed that the application proposed the replacing of the garage door.

The Committee moved into debate.

The Cllr Mark Goldsack proposed and Cllr Bill Hunt seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and the Committee unanimously agreed

to resolve:

to Approve the application 25/01170/FUL for the garage conversion, removal of garage door and infill with window and addition of porch to rear.

45. 25/0309/LBC – Main Street, Little Thetford

Cllr Bill Hunt left the meeting whilst this item was discussed and Cllr Mark Goldsack took the Chair.

Christopher Partrick, Conservation Officer, presented this report (AA116, previously circulated), which recommended that the Committee approve the application to replace the window in the north dormer of 4 Main Street, Little Thetford, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1.S

Councillors were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, the Conservation Officer explained that unlike the window under discussion, the other dormer window on the building had not been added in 1994.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith proposed and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and the Committee unanimously agreed

to resolve:

to **Approve** application 25/0309/LBC to replace the window in the north dormer of 4 Main Street, Little Thetford, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1.

46. Sunnica Non-material Change (NMC) Application

Yole Medeiros, Major Projects Officer, presented this report (AA117, previously circulated), which recommended that the Committee approve the Council's response to the non-material change (NMC) proposed by Sunnica Limited to The Sunnica Energy Farm Order 2024 (the Development Consent Order, DCO), which came into force on 3 August 2024.

Councillors were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, the Major Projects Officer confirmed that the drain that was being crossed was not a navigable water course.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the substation on this location had already been built, and the Committee were being asked to confirm no objection would be raised to the application to move the boundary in the original DCO. The Major Projects Officer confirmed that permission to lay the cables had been agreed in the original DCO.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Mark Goldsack proposed and Cllr John Trapp seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 10 votes in favour and 1 abstention the Committee agreed

to resolve:

- (i) To **approve** the draft response (Appendix 1), agreeing with the nature and scope of proposed changes as non-material to the DCO; and;
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager to submit the response on behalf of ECDC.

47. Planning Performance Report

David Morren, Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager, presented a report (AA118, previously circulated) summarising the performance of the Planning Department in November 2025. He explained that the appeal regarding the decision to refuse an application to build tennis courts at Ben's Yard, Soham Road, Stuntney had been dismissed, as the applicant had been unable to overcome the refusal in relation to the presences of bats, a protected species. It was noted that the application could be resubmitted if this issue was addressed.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager for his work regarding a planning matter on Main Street, Witchford.

It was resolved:

To **note** the report.

48. 25/00639/FUM – Hightown Drove, Burwell

This item was considered after agenda item 5.

The Major Projects Officer presented the report, (AA119, previously circulated) which recommended that the Committee approve the erection of a battery energy storage facility and associated infrastructure on land south west of Hightown Drove, Burwell. She reported that Cllr Charlotte Cane, local member for the parish of Reach, had written to express her opposition to the application.

Sara Phipps made the following statement as an objector to the application. "My name is Sara Phipps. I am the secretary of BEAT – Burwell Energy Awareness Team, and I speak on behalf of our group today.

“BEAT formed in October last year. We exist to make Burwell residents aware of energy developments in our village. We are a community group comprising of Burwell residents who are engineers and physicists, with direct industry experience.

“We recently carried out a technical assessment of the Weirs Drove BESS using only publicly available documents from the ECDC Planning Portal. Our assessment was based on resident concerns, and lessons learned from battery storage failures worldwide.

“We tested whether those concerns were properly addressed by the approved planning documents.

“Our findings are stark. Across the areas assessed, 67% were rated red. Meaning there was no visible evidence, there was missing information, or evidence of poorly, if any, quality controls applied.

“Last week this assessment was formally passed to the ECDC planning team, via our District councillor David Brown, and is now with Sophie Browne who is currently investigating our findings.

“These unresolved issues highlight serious weaknesses in how battery storage sites are regulated, monitored and enforced, creating potential risks to public safety. We raise these points today to ensure the same failures are not repeated at Hightown Drove.

“Our statement is clear. Robust planning is not just about approving infrastructure. It is about ensuring it operates safely for the lifetime of the development. It is about ensuring conditions of planning are implemented and followed through.

“We therefore ask that consideration of the Hightown Drove application be paused until these issues are fully addressed, that they are built into robust and enforceable planning conditions and applied consistently to all current and future battery storage developments in and around Burwell.

“Our key concerns are:

- Fire safety conditions.
- Firewater containment and environmental protection.
- Noise.
- And Emergency Response Planning.

“Although planning documents reference an Emergency Response Plan, we can find no evidence of an operational plan shared between the operator, the Council, and Fire and Rescue Services.

“Local residents have no guidance on what they should do in the event of an incident. They need guidance directly or facilitated via the Parish Council as soon as possible.

"The officer referred to Condition 11 in her introduction, there is no evidence we can find for this existing for Weirs Drove."

Julia Rogers made the following statement as an objector to the application: "I object to the scheme because the battery energy storage noise will be above background noise levels at the Reach 24 Acres which runs adjacent to that field."

"The Grenergy noise assessment claims that the predicted noise rating levels are sufficiently low to not cause adverse impact on the receptor. The receptor points used in their survey are the roads with traffic noise where there are some residential properties. No impact assessment in quiet Reach 24 Acres adjacent to the proposed site has been undertaken. Reach 24 Acres connects Hightown Drove in Burwell to Reach. Incorporating memorial benches, apple orchards and many native trees planted in memory of loved ones including those in the orchard. The community invested time and money with the National Trust to create this peaceful environment. Will East Cambridgeshire District Council reject this application on the basis of intrusive noise above background noise levels? And if approved, can a planning condition for an independent noise assessment using the noise level at Reach 24 Acres as a receptor point be undertaken before it goes to completion and before going live and can these receptor points be approved by East Cambridgeshire District Council?"

Members were invited to ask questions to the public speakers.

In reply to Cllr James Lay, Sara Phipps explained that as far as she was aware there was no plan in place for the event of a fire at the site. She understood that if there was a fire at the Weirs Drove site it would be three days before it was regarded as an emergency and this was a concern to residents.

In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, Julia Rogers explained that the noise from the Weirs Drove site had not been assessed in its four years of operation and residents were suffering from the noise. She was concerned that a peaceful area of the countryside would be lost due to the noise from the battery proposed in the application and she asserted that it needed an independent assessment.

In reply to Cllr Lavinia Edwards, Sara Phipps stated that Burwell was a densely populated area and she were concerned about the battery at Weirs Drove and the fact that BEAT could find no evidence that the annual noise report agreed in the planning conditions had been carried out. She hoped that any conditions regarding this application under discussion would be enforced.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, Sara Phipps explained that the Weirs Drove substation was across the road from the site of the planning application and she reiterated that she could find no evidence that the noise had been monitored despite the fact that this was an agreed planning condition.

The agent Norome Campanile made the following statement on behalf of the applicant:

“Over recent years the UK has made impressive strides regarding renewable energy, with wind and solar power making an important contribution to our energy mix, but these sources are intermittent, without a way to store excess energy, we end up wasting it. In fact, in 2025, Britain spent close to £1.5 billion on curtailing wind power, paying to switch off turbines because we could not use the energy when it was generated. Instead, fossil fuel plants were turned on to meet demand. This is where battery storage comes in. Facilities, like the one we are proposing, store clean energy when it is abundant and release it when it is needed. This can save British taxpayers up to £40 billion by 2050, by cutting waste and enhancing grid reliability.

“Concerns regarding the safety of this technology have been raised, so I want to provide some reassuring information. There is a plethora of legislation and regulations, and guidelines are in place to ensure that developers build their projects to the highest standard. The industry is constantly innovating and we are seeing more efficient and safer battery technology coming out each year. Globally the amount of batteries being built is increasing rapidly. Conversely the number of fires are decreasing. The incident rate fell by 98% in between 2018 to 2024. Improvements in design and battery chemistry have resulted in this decrease in fires. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service have and will continue to be consulted at all stages of the project. We can also confirm that the project follows the latest guidance. In the unlikely event of a fire, the approach is not to put the fire out, but to carry out boundary cooling, where the unit is left to a controlled burn and water is sprayed on adjacent containers, where they will remain cool. The entire site is designed with a closed off drainage system and the water will run off into a lined basin to ensure that the water does not seep into the local system.

“The second point I wish to raise is the impact that this will have on the Wicken Fen Nature Reserve and residential amenity. We have had confirmation from all the statutory consultees that they are satisfied with our methodology and findings. They have endorsed our view that the site will not have a detrimental effect on the wildlife in the area.

“In conclusion, we have designed this application to meet the highest environmental and safety standards with minimal visual impact. It is a clean, quiet, local traffic facility that supports national goals and will provide real local benefit.”

Toni Hylton made the following statement on behalf of the applicant:

“Hopefully you have had a chance to visit the site and understand the project. We appreciate the support of the officer, which is an opinion shared by the Planning Inspectorate, as 80% of renewable energy appeals have been allowed. GROWTH 2 accepts renewable energy projects in rural areas on the basis that the proposals agree with policy ENV6. Therefore, the starting point is that the principle of development is acceptable. ENV6 states that renewable energy proposals should be supported unless it will have significant adverse effects, listing seven considerations. Three of these can be discounted, as

there are no protected views, there are no airfields and there are no heritage assets that would be affected by the proposal. The proposal is in excess of 450 metres from the nearest residential property and in consultation with the EHO, no concerns in regard to noise have been raised. It is considered that the proposal will not create disturbance by way of noise or loss of light and so the amenity of the neighbours will be maintained. Whilst some residents may have sight of the proposal, as Members will know, this is not a reason to reject a proposal, particularly as there is no policy supporting a right to a view. Landscaping impacts are considered to be localised, given the mitigation strategy. However, any impact needs to be weighed against the benefits, particularly with regards to the provision of renewable energy and local carbon reduction. The proposal should also be read in context to its surrounding, against a backdrop of existing power installations. Whilst concerns from residents have been received, it is important to note that the application is supported by a number of technical reports which demonstrate that no significant adverse effects arise from this development, in accordance with ENV6.

“East Cambridgeshire District Council in 2019 declared a climate emergency and like the Government they have set a net zero target by 2050 and this proposal will help to meet that target. It is hoped that Members see the benefit of this scheme, aiding the Council to meet its own net zero target by 2050. Locating the proposal in an area where connectivity can be made, set amongst other power installations and it can deliver a significant increase in biodiversity, over and above the 10% required by the local authority.”

Councillors were invited to question those speaking on behalf of the applicant.

In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, Norome Campanile stated that the Cambridgeshire Fire Service had raised no objections to the application. She supported Cllr Goodearl's suggestion for annual inspections of the site.

In reply to Cllr Lavinia Edwards, Norome Campanile stated that no decision had been taken regarding the sourcing of the solar panels, but it was likely that they would come from China. In the unlikely event of fire, it would be contained and left to burn itself out with boundary containers being cooled. Measures were in place to minimise the risk of contamination. In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Norome Campanile stated the water would not be used to put out the fire but to ensure that the fire was contained. There was an isolation valve that ensured that the internal drainage system was closed and that there would be no contamination.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Norome Campanile explained that the proposal was to build on 3A agricultural land and there had been no objections to the biodiversity plan to ensure no significant local harm.

In reply to Cllr Mary Wade, Norome Campanile stated that the plans had met the requirements of the Cambridgeshire Fire Service, who would be notified of any amendments made to the plans. If the guidance changed, then the plans

would be amended. Meetings would be held with the two parish councils to mitigate their concerns.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, Norome Campanile reported that UK Power Networks had noted the location of the overhead power lines and there was no evidence that this presented a risk. Fire vehicles could access the site if necessary and vehicles would be monitoring the site one or twice a week to carry out maintenance. In the event of a fire, up to 1,900 litres of water a minute could be discharged for two hours. The flooding and drainage consultants had recommended the location of the attenuation ponds due to natural run off.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, Toni Hylton explained that plans were in place to have discussions with the two parish councils and residents. The technology was changing and it was possible the development could reduce in size, with liquid cooling.

In reply to Cllr James Lay, Toni Hylton explained that the applicant had worked with the Cambridgeshire Fire Service to draw up an emergency response plan. It had been agreed that there was no need to have an evacuation plan for residents as any fire would be contained.

In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, Toni Hylton reported that the battery management system contained kill switches, which would automatically inform the Fire Service if activated. In the event of a fire, water run off would be contained and all containers had vents to minimise chances of explosion.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Toni Hylton confirmed that it would be necessary to power the battery from the national grid. Energy stored would be sold back to the national grid. Jonathan Cooper confirmed that Grenergy had no relation to existing development in the area.

Cllr Chika Akinwale left the meeting.

John Huges from the National Trust made the following statement:
“On behalf of the National Trust I am speaking to oppose the application. Our role is to protect special locations, so that people and nature can thrive. We fully recognise the need to address climate change and the importance of reaching net zero, however, we believe that this needs to be achieved without causing significant harm to landscapes and habitats. The proposed development sits in an area recognised as an important one for biodiversity. This landscape is already under pressure and its long-term survival relies on connected habitats, which is essential for wildlife movement. The remaining lowland fen habitats are scarce and scattered. Infrastructure such as deer fencing, security lighting and drainage risk creating new barriers, undermining existing and potential wildlife corridors, which are vital for nature recovery.

“With regards to noise, the site lies next to a project managed jointly by Reach Parish Council and the National Trust to connect people with nature and create habitats for turtle doves and other protected species. It is a big project,

aiming to connect people with nature and the tranquillity that is out there. Even a low continuous hum will permeate the areas that have been visually screened and undermine the tranquillity that defines this space. Levels of noise in planning regulations are based on those of an urban environment, not areas that are special for how quiet they are. Introducing industrial noise here would be intrusive and inappropriate.

“With regards to visual impact, policy ENV1 of the Local Plan requires development to conserve and enhance landscape character. Introducing a built form in an overwhelming rural area will noticeably affect the landscape character and affect the amenity for people who are walking and cycling nearby. It is not reasonable to argue that this development will simply blend in to the surrounding landscape. Containment is essential and without it, expansion becomes indefinite and the character of the wider landscape is gradually lost. I would also note that the screening on the western side of the site is our hedge on our land and it should not be our responsibility to screen their development.

“With regards to cumulative effects, within 4.5 kilometres of Wicken Fen, 6.5% of land is committed to solar power development, which will rise to 8% if this application is approved, whilst the UK average is 0.1%. We are already at saturation point and further development will intensify the cumulative effects.”

Neighbour Edward Hall made the following statement:

“I am a resident of Burwell Road, Reach and I am also representing other neighbours on this road. This is not nimbyism, we live next to a large regional substation which has battery storage, we can all see this. This is encroaching on the nature that we have. Fen land is very flat and any additional buildings block the view. There are only two fields between our road and the rest of the substation but if this application is agreed there will be only one field separating us. The animals, such as deer, will be funnelled into one very small space and that will become a problem.

“Residents have big concerns about smoke coming off the development. It is very windy and very flat. That will affect us constantly. The development is over a line. Hightown Drove is a cut off, with nature on one side and the development on the other. This is going over that line and we want to protect that. This could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Do we need the capacity in this area? Nationally yes, but in this area, maybe not.”

Councillors were invited to ask questions of the public speakers.

In reply to Cllr Lavinia Edwards, John Hughes from the National Trust explained that independent work on species recovery was being carried out.

In response to discussion on the south west hedge line, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the indicative landscaping conditions had not been agreed.

In reply to Cllr Bill Hunt, John Hughes stated that any barrier between the two fens could have a negative impact on nature in the area.

Cllr Nick Aklam from Reach Parish Council made the following statement:

"I am a member of Reach Parish Council but am also here today with the express approval of Burwell Parish Council to represent their interests as well. There is a strong consensus within our collective communities in opposition to this scheme. It is important to say that the residents of both villages are not opposed to green energy development and as you have heard, the area already hosts a significant green energy presence. However, we see no contradiction in support for the principle of green energy but opposition to poor and inappropriate proposals, such as this one.

"The planning officer has recommended that on balance the application should be approved. I am here to attempt to persuade you to refuse the application and I want to do that by introducing evidence that is not in the planning officer's report and to take a different interpretation of the evidence. Firstly, I wish to question the benefits of this scheme. The underlying assumption of the planning officer's report and more explicitly paragraphs 7.5 to 7.10, is that the scheme is needed by the electricity supply system of the country, as it moves to decarbonise and accordingly the planning officer concludes that the application meets the criteria of ENV6, policy GROWTH 2 and PPF3. I wish to point out to you that on 3 December last year the National Energy System Operator (NESO), who governs who gets connection to the grid and when, presented the findings of its national review, attempting to bring a strategy to the energy supply distribution system in the UK. The report, and I have a couple of slides that I can show people if they wish to see the detail, reveals that there are way more best applications in the pipeline that are needed for the foreseeable future. The oversupply across the country to 2035 is a huge 62 gigawatts and to give you some idea of the scale of that, a gigawatt of electricity can power 700,000 to 1 million homes. In other words, there is 75% more capacity in the planning system than can be feasibly accommodated by the electricity supply system. The proportion of schemes that are forming this over capacity already have planning permission and may have previously been granted permission to connect to the grid. Grenergy is aware of this review and has informed me previously that it does not have a confirmed connection to the grid. It is thus someway down the list of best applicants hoping for a connection at some point in the indeterminate future. I would also point out that NESO, national grid and Ofgem are reviewing future development of the grid connections at Burwell, which adds uncertainty to the future viability and deliverability of the scheme. So the benefit of this scheme to the UK's electricity infrastructure and to our locality is at best, very unclear.

"On issues of harm, colleagues have already pointed out a number of the issues. I wish to point out that the planning officer's report failed to mention that all of the households of Reach live within 1 kilometre of the proposed scheme and some are much closer than that. A number of houses in Burwell are also within 1 kilometre of the site. In the absence of any firm regulations from UK central government, 1 kilometre might sound like an arbitrary

distance, but I mention it because there is a bill in the California state legislature, which is proscribing a distance of 1 kilometre from any scheme. I am not trying to draw direct comparisons between the Grenergy scheme and the Moss Landing scheme which drove that legislation forward but I think that the long term impact on public health and the environment are being assessed and I exhort the Committee to adopt a safety first approach and either reject the scheme or postpone making a decision, to wait for further information.

“I would also like to briefly mention the visual intrusion of this scheme, which should be seen in the context of all the other schemes that are in the pipeline or are actually being built. I think that the cumulative effect of these developments is impacting on the countryside and industrialising the southern end of Burwell Fen. In conclusion, I ask you to reject the scheme.”

Councillors were invited to ask questions.

In reply to Cllr James Lay, Cllr Nick Aklam explained that the fact that properties were within 1 kilometre was important due to the sound from the site, especially in the summer months, and due to safety concerns in the event of a thermal explosion.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, Cllr Nick Aklam explained that the NESO review showed that there was an emerging policy, whilst the BESS application related to the previous system.

Officers were invited to make any comments.

The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Government had announced a new national policy two weeks ago. This had given substantial weight to a net zero future. He added that the application met the planning guidelines regarding biodiversity and the Cambridgeshire Fire Service had raised no concerns with regards to fire safety. He concluded that any objections to the application had to be on planning grounds.

The Major Projects Officer explained that many of the concerns raised were addressed by planning conditions. Concerns regarding fire safety were covered in condition 11. There was also a noise management plan. Condition 27, included a standard concern on decommissioning.

Councillors were invited to ask questions to officers.

In reply to Cllr Martin Goodearl, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager reported that the Council did hold copies of emergency plans if it was relevant to the agreed conditions. He stated that the purpose of conditions was to mitigate harm and so it would not be possible to include a condition that lowered residents' energy bills.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that Condition 11 would ensure that the safety valve would shut off to prevent run off in the event of a fire. He reiterated that the Cambridgeshire Fire Service was responsible for the fire safety aspects of the project and they had raised no objections to the application. He also reiterated that he would look into report that there had been no assessment of noise generated by the Weirs Drove battery but Condition 11 would ensure that noise resulting from this application would be monitored. Environmental Services could rule on whether noise levels exceeded acceptable levels and mitigation could be put into place if this occurred.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager stated that a noise assessment had been undertaken and there was no requirement for the extra planting of trees to mitigate a potential noise nuisance.

In reply to Cllr Mary Wade, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager assured the Committee that wording in Conditions would be enforced.

In reply to Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that any decision made by the Committee to refuse an application had to be for evidenced planning reasons otherwise any appeal would be lost and this would be expensive. He added that the Council had to abide by the policies in its Local Plan.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Council had the enforcement powers to ensure that the land was restored to agricultural land and the authority could add a step charge onto the land if a company went in receivership.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Mark Goldsack stated that the Government had ruled that more green energy projects needed to be agreed in order to meet its targets. If the Council refused applications for these projects they would be approved on appeal, at a cost to the district's taxpayers. Whilst he recognised climate change, he questioned whether some of these projects could claim to be green when much of the materials had to be shipped from China. He hoped that residents understood the difficult position the Council was in. He was minded to abstain on this matter.

Cllr James Lay urged the Committee to make a moral stand on this issue and not agree an application because of the Government's policy.

Cllr Bill Hunt urged that if the Committee was to vote to refuse the application, it needed to give good planning reasons for this decision.

Cllr Alan Sharp proposed that the Committee oppose the application, as it was outside the development envelope and he did not consider it likely the land would be returned to agricultural use in 35 years. He expressed concern about the resulting noise and light pollution and the health and safety risks it would bring to residents. Cllr Lavinia Edwards agreed with Cllr Sharp.

Cllr John Trapp agreed to second Cllr Sharp's proposal, as he considered that the application would locate the battery too close to residents and the overhead powerline. He was concerned that any resulting fire could not be safely contained. He wanted evidence that the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service had considered all the fire safety concerns identified by residents and the Committee and he queried why there was no evacuation plan. He questioned whether the battery needed to be so close to the substation as modern powerlines prevented energy loss. He suggested that the application needed more details on these matters. He concluded that the Committee should not be obligated to approve all green energy applications and that this was not a good application, with significant risks and so he would not support it.

Cllr Mary Wade also opposed the application. She expressed concern that the concerns of local residents had not been addressed. She concluded that the Committee had the power to reject planning applications and should not feel compelled to agree all applications relating to green energy.

Cllr Martin Goodearl also opposed the application and expressed concern regarding reports that conditions imposed on the battery at Weirs Drove were not being enforced. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the status of a condition relating to another application could not be used to justify refusing a different application.

Cllr Christine Colbert hoped that a condition could be added for an ongoing plan for safety issues and that any changes in the industry standards be reported to the parish councils.

The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Council's Local Plan allowed renewable energy development outside the local envelope. He advised that the Committee would need to quantify any adverse impacts of the application, which could not be mitigated by conditions, to justify refusal.

In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager advised that the Government guidelines defined what constituted green energy and this application met that definition.

Cllr Martin Goodearl opposed the application due to concerns regarding resident safety. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager advised that the Cambridgeshire Fire Service had not raised any objection to the application. He suggested that the Committee should consider mitigating its concerns through conditions.

Cllr Alan Sharp justified his opposition to the application by stating that it was contrary to policy ENV6, as it would have a significant adverse impact on the countryside and residential amenity. In his view the application would also create unacceptable noise and light pollution and it was clear that fire risks needed to be addressed. He added that he felt that the applicant had not addressed the concerns of the Committee. Cllr Mark Goldsack added that concerns regarding the impact on nature and the wildlife corridor between the two fens needed to be addressed. If agreed, the application would change the character of the area.

The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager urged the Committee to either agree additional conditions or provide good planning reasons for refusal.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith recommended that the Committee defer the application to allow the concerns raised by members to be addressed. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager suggested that if the Committee was going to defer the decision, they should consider delegating power to him to liaise with Cllr Sharp and, if necessary, the applicant, to ensure that the Committee had the information it needed to make a decision. He added that if the Committee did defer the application, it should come back to the next meeting to avoid delaying this matter any further.

The Locum Planning Lawyer advised that members' concerns that the application had not been well prepared was not in itself a good reason to refuse the application. The application as submitted had been assessed by officers and the planning conditions proposed addressed most of the concerns raised by the Committee. He advised that if this matter was taken to appeal, the Council would struggle to justify its decision to refuse based on the arguments provided so far by the Committee. In that regard, any reasons for refusal would need to be robustly and precisely drafted. He suggested that if the Committee decided to defer then it would give time to properly consider the arguments for refusal and formulate reasons accordingly. Cllr Martin Goodearl supported this approach and suggested that the Committee could still vote to refuse the application and should not be fearful of the matter being taken to appeal.

Cllr Mark Goldsack asserted that the Committee needed to represent the views of residents from Burwell and Reach. He suggested that deferring a decision would give time to investigate concerns that had been raised at the Committee, in particular the safety matters raised by the public speakers. Cllr Mary Wade agreed and added that residents needed to be assured that conditions agreed by the Council, such as concerns regarding noise, would be enforced.

Cllr Alan Sharp proposed and Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith seconded that the decision be deferred for reasons already discussed. A vote was taken and with 7 votes in favour and four against the Committee agreed:

to resolve:

- (i) To **defer** this item to the next available Committee.
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager in conjunction with Cllr Alan Sharp to review and construct potential reasons for refusal and to consider any further evidence or supporting documents should they be submitted by the applicants. To draw up additional conditions, in consultation with Cllr Alan Sharp and with the applicant providing further information if required to do so. With a further report outlining these to be presented to elected members at the appropriate time.

The meeting concluded at 6:55 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....